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FOR INFORMATION

INTERIM REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON DOCUMENTATION

SUMMARY

In accordance with Executive Board decision 1996/5 (E/ICEF/1996/12 (Part I)), adopted at the first regular session in January 1996, a Working Group on Documentation has been established. The present interim report on its work is being transmitted to the Executive Board and will be introduced by a representative of one of the linguistic groups.

* E/ICEF/1996/13.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Working Group on Documentation was formed pursuant to Executive Board decision 1996/5 of 25 January 1996. The membership of the working group is as follows:

Country	Linguistic group
Morocco	Arabic
China	Chinese
Trinidad and Tobago	English
France	French
Spain	Spanish
Ukraine	Russian

2. In addition, representatives of the Executive Board secretariats of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and of the United Nations Office of Conference and Support Services (UNOCSS) have been assigned to serve on the working group.

3. Members of the working group participated in an on-site visit to UNOCSS, including the reproduction and distribution services, and received an introductory briefing from UNOCSS. The group held four meetings between 5 March and 24 April.

II. TOPICS DISCUSSED

4. The following topics were discussed by the working group:

(a) Length of documents;

(b) Submission of documents to UNOCSS;

(c) Electronic distribution of documentation;

(d) Possibility of processing documentation outside the United Nations Secretariat.

5. At its session on 24 April 1996, the working group formulated the following recommendations on these issues:

(a) Length of documents

(i) As is already the case with UNICEF documents, reports over five pages long (not including country programming documents) should have an executive summary;

(ii) In the case of UNDP/UNFPA, the three-page limit established in decision 94/4 should be revised, and, building on relevant UNICEF decisions, a sliding scale for the length of reports should be introduced, depending on their nature;

(iii) Statistical annexes and tables should, to the extent possible, be presented in separately issued parts of a document to expedite processing;

(iv) Addenda to a main document should be subject to the sliding scale to be established under (ii) above;

(b) Submission of documents to UNOCSS

(i) Documents should be submitted to UNOCSS 10 weeks before the start of a session in an endeavour to comply with paragraph 4 of section C of General Assembly resolution 50/206, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that documentation is available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents, simultaneously in each of the six official languages of the United Nations. The Executive Boards may wish to bear this in mind when scheduling their sessions;

(ii) In order to assist in the processing of documentation, the submission of documents to UNOCSS should be planned so as to ensure that a heavy spate of documents is not submitted on the deadline. In collaboration with UNOCSS, a priority list of documents should be established to ensure that those requiring particularly careful scrutiny in the capitals will be distributed sufficiently in advance of the session to allow for this. Prioritization will be particularly important in the case of the country programming documents;

It is intended that these arrangements will normally obviate the need for advance copies in the original language only. However, to facilitate discussion of forthcoming issues in informal sessions in the weeks between the submission of documents to UNOCSS and their distribution to delegations, relevant documents may be informally distributed, on an exceptional basis, in advance copy in the original language. Additional or updated information submitted after the 10-week deadline that is intended for circulation at a Board session, particularly as a result of consultations between delegations and the secretariats, should be made available as brief documents, not to exceed three pages, in the three working languages;

(c) Electronic distribution of documentation. Having examined various possibilities for the electronic distribution of documentation, the working group decided that, as a principle, the simultaneous distribution of documentation in all languages must be respected. It would therefore discourage the general distribution of advance copies in electronic form (except in those special circumstances noted above). Arrangements for the electronic

distribution of documentation should be coordinated with those of UNOCSS, whose plans are to make the services currently provided by the present optical disk system available on the Internet by the last quarter of 1996;

(d) Translation and processing documentation outside the United Nations system. The working group looked at the possibilities of processing documentation externally. The costs of such a measure would be prohibitive, would have to be borne entirely by the organizations involved and would not benefit from the economies of scale that accrue to the United Nations Secretariat. In addition, the dearth of competent translators would mean that the organizations would be competing with the United Nations for the same small pool.